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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

17 May 1960

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Implications of a Break-Off of the Summit Conference

I. KHRUSHCHEV'S MOTIVES

1. We believe it likely, though not certain, that Khrushchev has for some time considered that the Summit Conference would be unproductive for the USSR. His Baku speech of 25 April indicated a distinct hardening of his position. He probably saw little prospect of gain for the USSR in the Berlin issue. The U-2 incident, with the subsequent statements of high US officials, gave him what he apparently decided was an opportunity to break off the conference in a manner favorable to Soviet interests. He probably believes that there will be support for his position by public opinion in the world, and criticism of the US, and that these can be used to Soviet advantage. By breaking on the issue of overflights rather than that of Berlin, he retains much flexibility; he can, if he wishes, postpone action on Berlin while he further tests and influences the international situation.

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2. In addition, we believe that Khrushchev and his associates are seriously and deeply concerned by the whole matter of US overflights. They are seen not only as an affront to the sovereignty and prestige of the USSR but as a dangerous invasion of the secrecy on which the whole Soviet system so largely rests. The Soviet rulers are almost certainly unable to tolerate a claim, whether expressed or implied, that the US or any other foreign power has a right to aerial inspection of Soviet territory. They want to stop this breach in the security of the Bloc.

3. Finally we believe that Khrushchev has probably been subject to some pressure from elements in the USSR, and from Communist China, to modify his general policy of detente and peaceful co-existence. We do not believe these pressures are strong enough to control his conduct, but they probably have some effect. He probably sees the breakup of the conference as an opportunity to mollify these elements in the Communist world, as well as to serve Soviet interests in other respects.

4. In breaking off the Summit on the issue of US reconnaissance flights over the USSR Khrushchev would presumably have the following aims in mind:

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(a) To magnify the blame he has attempted to attach to the US for disrupting the Summit with the U-2 incident, and by raising tension over it, to oblige the US to modify its position on aerial reconnaissance. In either case, he would expect the credit of the US to be diminished and its ability to maintain a firm position on other issues weakened.

(b) To intimidate US allies from supporting the US on this issue and thus, in a situation of high tension, forcing a split in the Western front on this and other matters, in particular Berlin.

(c) To retrieve the loss of face he feels he has suffered at home and abroad as a result of the US incursions over a long period, and in particular to establish that Soviet sovereignty over its airspace cannot be violated with impunity.

5. Thus we believe that Khrushchev's primary concern is not only to obtain a disavowal of the U-2 incident itself, but also to utilize that affair to divide the Allies and to create a psychological situation favorable to pressing Soviet demands on other matters, especially on Berlin.

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II. FURTHER SOVIET ACTIONS

6. Khrushchev is representing the present situation to mean that negotiation at the Summit to reduce tensions has, as a result of the US actions and attitude, been made impossible at this time. We think this means that Khrushchev does not at present intend to embark on a protracted period of greatly intensified cold war. He is unlikely to admit that he has altered his general policies, or to say that he is no longer in favor of reduction of tensions through negotiations. He will count on developments in Western opinion to permit a resumption of negotiations later on terms and in an atmosphere more favorable to the USSR. Through action in the UN against the US and by a major propaganda campaign, an attempt will be made to bring the US to the negotiating table again under serious psychological disadvantages.

7. It is unlikely that a breakdown of the Summit will be followed by precipitate Soviet action on the Berlin issue of a kind which would create immediate dangers, although some limited measures to heighten pressure on Berlin may be undertaken. The risks of more severe Soviet action such as interference with access to Berlin would be heightened. We believe that Khrushchev still wants neither a high risk of war over Berlin nor a reversal of world opinion toward his claims to be promoting a policy of peace.

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8. The initial dismay and even alarm in world opinion which will almost certainly accompany a Summit breakdown would be increased if Soviet propaganda adopted a menacing line. The pressure of public opinion, even in Western Europe, for a compromise will probably be great. We do not believe, however, that, in the immediate aftermath of a Summit breakdown, Allied governments will abandon their adherence to the essentials of Western positions on other issues, including Berlin.

9. It is possible that the Soviets will overplay their hand in exploiting the overflight issue, and that the initial blame attached to the US for the Summit breakdown will fall away. This would be particularly the case if the USSR refuses to settle for the President's statement that overflights will not be repeated. A Soviet attempt to press the case further, for example by insisting upon a repudiation of the past actions and removal or punishment of those responsible, would probably result in world opinion turning against Soviet exploitation of the incident.

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